

SMUGGLER BEN

by Mary Pollock



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SMUGGLER BEN

Enid Blyton

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CHAPTER 1

THE COTTAGE BY THE SEA

Three children got out of a bus and looked round them in excitement. Their mother smiled to see their glowing faces.

"Well, here we are!" she said. "How do you like it?"

"Is this the cottage we're going to live in for four weeks?" said Alec, going up to the little white gate. "Mother! It's perfect!"

The two girls, Hilary and Frances, looked at the small square cottage, and agreed with their brother. Red roses climbed all over the cottage even to the chimneys. The thatched roof came down low over the ground-floor windows, and in the thatch itself other little windows jutted out.

"I wonder which is our bedroom," said Hilary, looking up at the roof. "I hope that one is—because it will look out over the sea."

"Well, let's go in and see," said Mother. "Help with the suitcases, Alec. I hope the heavy luggage has already arrived."

They opened the white gate of Sea Cottage and went up the little stone path. It was set with orange marigolds at each side, and hundreds of the bright red-gold flowers looked up at the children as they passed.

The cottage was very small inside. The front door opened straight on to the little sitting-room. Beyond was a tiny dark kitchen. To the left was another room, whose walls were covered with bookshelves lined with books. The children stared at them in surprise.

"The man who owns this house is someone who is interested in olden times," said Mother, "so most of these books are about long-ago days, I expect. They belong to

Professor Rondel. He said that you might dip into any of the books if you liked, on condition that you put them back very carefully in the right place."

"Well, I don't think I shall want to do any dipping into these books!" said Hilary.

"No—dipping in the sea will suit *you* better!" laughed Frances. "Mother, let's see our bedrooms now."

They went upstairs. There were three bedrooms, one very tiny indeed. Two were at the front and one was at the back. A small one and a large one were at the front, and a much bigger one behind.

"I shall have this big one," said Mother. "Then if Daddy comes down there will be plenty of room for him, too. Alec, you can have the tiny room overlooking the sea. And you two girls can have the one next to it."

"That overlooks the sea, too!" said Hilary joyfully. "But, Mother—wouldn't *you* like a room that looks out over the sea? Yours won't."

"I shall see the sea out of this little side window," said Mother, going to it. "And anyway, I shall get a wonderful view of the moors at the back. You know how I love them, especially now when the heather is out."

The children gazed out at the moors ablaze with purple heather. It was really a lovely spot.

"Blue sea in front and purple heather behind," said Alec. "What can anyone want better than that?"

"Well—tea for one thing," said Frances. "I'm most terribly hungry. Mother, could we have something to eat before we do anything?"

"If you like," said Mother. "We can do the unpacking afterwards. Alec, there is a tiny village down the road there, with about two shops and a few fishermen's cottages. Go with the girls and see if you can buy something for tea."

They clattered down the narrow wooden stairway and ran out of the front door and down the path between the

marigolds. They went down the sandy road, where blue chicory blossomed by the wayside and red poppies danced.

"Isn't it heavenly!" cried Hilary. "We're at the seaside—and the holidays are just beginning. We've never been to such a lovely little place before. It's much, much nicer than the big places we've been to. I don't want bands and piers and steamers and things. I only want the yellow sands, and big rocky cliffs, and water as blue as this."

"I vote we go down to the beach after tea, when we've helped Mother to unpack," said Alec. "The tide will be going out then. It comes right up to the cliffs now. Look at it splashing high up the rocks!"

The children peered over the edge of the cliff and saw the white spray flying high. It was lovely to watch. The gulls soared above their heads, making laughing cries as they went.

"I would love to be a gull for a little while," said Frances longingly. "Just think how glorious it would be to glide along on the wind like that for ages and ages. Sometimes I dream I'm doing that."

"So do I," said Hilary. "It's a lovely feeling. Well, come on. It's no good standing here when we're getting things for tea. I'm awfully hungry."

"You always are," said Alec. "I never knew such a girl. All right—come on, Frances. We can do all the exploring we want to after tea."

They ran off. Sand got into their shoes, but they liked it. It was all part of the seaside, and there wasn't anything at the sea that they didn't like. They felt very happy.

They came to the village—though really it could hardly be called a village. There were two shops. One was a tiny baker's, which was also the little post office. The other was a general store that sold everything from pokers to strings of sausages. It was a most fascinating shop.

"It even sells foreign stamps," said Alec, looking at some packets in the window. "And look—that's a fine boat. I might

buy that if I've got enough money."

Hilary went to the baker's. She bought a large crusty loaf, a big cake and some currant buns. She asked for their butter and jam at the other store. The little old lady who served her smiled at the children.

"So you've come to Sea Cottage, have you?" she said. "Well, I hope you have a good holiday. And mind you come along to see me every day, for I sell sweets, chocolates and ice-creams, as well as all the other things you see."

"Oooh!" said Hilary. "Well, we'll certainly come and see you then!"

They had a look at the other little cottages in the village. Fishing-nets were drying outside most of them, and one or two of them were being mended. A boy of about Alec's age was mending one. He stared at the children as they passed. They didn't know whether to smile or not.

"He looks a bit fierce, doesn't he?" said Hilary. They looked back at the boy. He did look rather fierce. He was very, very dark, and his face and hands were burnt almost black. He wore an old blue jersey and long trousers, rather ragged, which he had tied up at the ankles. He was barefooted, but beside him were big sea-boots.

"I don't think I like him much," said Frances. "He looks rather rough."

"Well, he won't bother *us* much," said Alec. "He's only a fisher-boy. Anyway, if he starts to be rough, *I* shall be rough, too—and he won't like that!"

"You wouldn't be nearly as strong as that fisher-boy," said Hilary.

"Yes, I would!" said Alec at once.

"No, you wouldn't," said Hilary. "I bet he's got muscles like iron!"

"Shut up, you two," said Frances. "Don't quarrel on our very first day here."

"All right," said Alec. "It's too lovely a day to quarrel. Come on—let's get back home. I want my tea."

They sat in the garden to have their tea. Mother had brought out a table and stools, and the four of them sat there happily, eating big crusty slices of bread and butter and jam, watching the white tops of the blue waves as they swept up the shore.

"The beach looks a bit dangerous for bathing," said Mother. "I'm glad you are all good swimmers. Alec, you must see that you find out what times are best for bathing. Don't let the girls go in if it's dangerous."

"We can just wear bathing-costumes, Mother, can't we?" said Alec. "And go barefoot?"

"Well, you won't want to go barefoot on those rocky cliffs, surely!" said Mother. "You can do as you like. But just be sensible, that's all."

"We'll help you to unpack now," said Hilary, getting up.

"Gracious, Hilary—you don't mean to say you've had enough tea yet?" said Alec, pretending to be surprised. "You've only had seven pieces of bread and jam, three pieces of cake and two currant buns!"

Hilary pulled Alec's hair hard and he yelled. Then they all went indoors. Mother said she would clear away the tea when they had gone down to the beach.

In half an hour all the unpacking was done and the children were free to go down to the beach. The tide was now out quite a long way and there was plenty of golden sand to run on.

"Come on!" said Alec impatiently. "Let's go. We won't change into bathing things now, it will waste time. We'll go as we are!"

So off they sped, down the marigold path, through the white gate, and into the sandy lane. A small path led across the grassy cliff-top to where steep steps had been cut in the cliff itself in order that people might get up and down.

"Down we go!" said Alec. "My word—doesn't the sea look grand! I've never seen it so blue in my life!"

CHAPTER 2

A HORRID BOY—AND A DISAPPOINTMENT

They reached the beach. It was wet from the tide and gleamed brightly as they walked on it. Their feet made little prints on it that faded almost as soon as they were made. Gleaming shells lay here and there, as pink as sunset.

There were big rocks sticking up everywhere, and around them were deep and shallow pools. The children loved paddling in them because they were so warm. They ran down to the edge of the sea and let the white edges of the waves curl over their toes. It was all lovely.

"The fishing-boats are out," said Alec, shading his eyes as he saw the boats setting out on the tide, their white sails gleaming in the sun. "And listen—is that a motor boat?"

It was. One came shooting by at a great pace, and then another. They came from the big seaside town not far off where many trippers went. The children watched them fly past, the white spray flying into the air.

They wandered along by the sea, exploring all the rock pools, picking up shells and splashing in the edge of the water. They saw nobody at all until they rounded a rocky corner of the beach and came to a small cove, well hidden between two jutting-out arms of the cliff.

They heard the sound of whistling, and stopped. Sitting beside a small boat, doing something to it, was the fisher-boy they had seen before tea.

He now had on his sea-boots, a red fisherman's cap with a tassel hanging down, and a bright red scarf tied round his trousers.

"That's the same boy we saw before," said Alec.

The boy heard the sound of voices on the breeze and looked up. He scowled, and his dark face looked savage. He

stood up and looked threateningly towards the three children.

"Well, he looks fiercer than ever," said Hilary at last. "What's the matter with him, I wonder? He doesn't look at all pleased to see us."

"Let's go on and take no notice of him," said Alec. "He's no right to glare at us like that. We're doing no harm!"

So the three children walked into the hidden cove, not looking at the fisher-boy at all. But as soon as they had taken three or four steps, the boy shouted at them loudly.

"Hey, you there! Keep out of this cove!"

The children stopped. "Why should we?" said Alec.

"Because it belongs to me," said the boy. "You keep out of this. It's been my cove for years, and no one's come here. I won't have you trippers coming into it and spoiling it."

"We're *not* trippers!" cried Hilary indignantly. "We're staying at Sea Cottage for a whole month."

"Well, you're trippers for a month then instead of for a day!" said the boy sulkily. "Clear off! I tell you. This is my own place here. I don't want anyone else in it. If you come here I'll set on you and beat you off."

The boy really looked so fierce that the children felt quite frightened. Then out of his belt he took a gleaming knife. That settled things for the two girls. They weren't going to have any quarrel with a savage boy who held such a sharp knife.

But Alec was furious. "How dare you threaten us with a knife!" he shouted. "You're a coward. I haven't a knife or I'd fight you."

"Alec! Come away!" begged Frances, clutching hold of her brother. "Do come away. I think that boy's mad. He looks it anyway."

The boy stood watching them, feeling the sharp edge of his knife with his thumb. His sullen face looked as black as thunder.

Frances and Hilary dragged Alec off round the rocky corner. He struggled with them to get free, and they tore his flannel shirt.

"Now look what you've done!" he cried angrily. "Let me go!"

"Alec, it's seven o'clock already and Mother said we were to be back by then," said Hilary, looking at her watch. "Let's go back. We can settle with that horrid boy another day."

Alec shook himself free and set off home with the girls rather sulkily. He felt that the evening had been spoilt. It had all been so lovely—and now that nasty boy had spoilt everything.

The girls told their mother about the boy, and she was astonished. "Well, he certainly does sound rather mad," she said. "For goodness' sake don't start quarrelling with him. Leave him alone."

"But, Mother, if he won't let us go into the little coves, it's not fair," said Hilary.

Mother laughed. "Don't worry about that!" she said. "There will be plenty of times when he's busy elsewhere, and the places you want to go to will be empty. Sometimes the people who live in a place do resent others coming to stay in it for a while."

"Mother, could we have a boat, do you think?" asked Alec. "It would be such fun."

"I'll go and see about one for you to-morrow," said Mother. "Now it's time you all went to bed. Hilary is yawning so widely that I can almost count her teeth!"

They were all tired. They fell into bed and went to sleep at once, although Hilary badly wanted to lie awake for a time and listen to the lovely noise the sea made outside her window. But she simply couldn't keep her eyes open, and in about half a minute she was as sound asleep as the other two.

It was lovely to wake up in the morning and remember everything. Frances woke first and sat up. She saw the blue

sea shining in the distance and she gave Hilary a sharp dig.

"Hilary! Wake up! We're at the seaside!"

Hilary woke with a jump. She sat up, too, and gazed out to the sea, over which white gulls were soaring. She felt so happy that she could hardly speak. Then Alec appeared at the door in his bathing-trunks. He had nothing else on at all, and his face was excited.

"I'm going for a dip," he said in a low voice. "Are you coming? Don't wake Mother. It's early."

The girls almost fell out of bed in their excitement. They pulled on bathing-dresses, and then crept out of the cottage with Alec.

It was about half-past six. The world looked clean and new. "Just as if it has been freshly washed," said Hilary, sniffing the sharp, salt breeze. "Look at those pink clouds over there! And did you ever see such a clear blue as the sea is this morning. Ooooh—it's cold!"

It *was* cold. The children ran into the water a little way and then stopped and shivered. Alec plunged right under and came up, shaking the drops from his hair. "Come on!" he yelled. "It's gorgeous once you're in!"

The girls were soon right under, and the three of them spent twenty minutes swimming out and back, diving under the water and catching each other's legs, then floating happily on their backs, looking up into the clear morning sky.

"Time to come out," said Alec at last. "Come on. Race you up the cliff!"

But they had to go slowly up the cliff, for the steps really were very steep. They burst into the cottage to find Mother up and bustling round to get breakfast ready.

At half-past seven they were all having breakfast. Afterwards Mother said she would tidy round the house and then do the shopping. The girls and Alec must make their own beds, just as they did at home.

“When we are down in the village I’ll make inquiries about a boat for you,” promised Mother, when at last the beds were made, the kitchen and sitting-room tidied and set in order. “Now, are we ready? Bring that big basket, Alec. I shall want that.”

“Mother, we must buy spades,” said Alec. “That sand would be gorgeous to dig in.”

“Gracious! Aren’t you too big to dig?” said Mother. The children laughed.

“Mother, you’re not too big either! Don’t you remember how you helped us to dig that simply enormous castle last year, with the big moat round it? It had steps all the way up it and was simply lovely.”

They set off joyously, Alec swinging the basket. They did a lot of shopping at the little general store, and the little old lady beamed at them.

“Do you know where I can arrange about hiring a boat for my children?” Mother asked her.

“Well,” said the old lady, whose name was Mrs. Polsett, “I really don’t know. We use all our boats hereabouts, you know. You could ask Samuel. He lives in the cottage over yonder. He’s got a small boat as well as a fishing-boat. Maybe he’d let the children have it.”

So Mother went across to where Samuel was sitting mending a great fishing-net. He was an old man with bright blue eyes and a wrinkled face like a shrivelled brown apple. He touched his forehead when Mother spoke to him.

“Have you a boat I could hire for my children?” Mother asked.

Samuel shook his head. “No, Mum,” he said. “I have got one, it’s true—but I’m not hiring it out any more. Some boys had it last year, and they lost the oars and made a great hole in the bottom. I lost more money on that there boat than I made.”

“Well, I’m sure my three children would be very careful indeed,” said Mother, seeing the disappointed faces around

her. "Won't you lend it to them for a week and see how they get on? I will pay you well."

"No, thank you kindly, Mum," said Samuel firmly.

"Is there anyone else who has a boat to spare?" said Alec, feeling rather desperate, for he had really set his heart on a boat.

"No one that I know of," said Samuel. "Some of us lost our small boats in a big storm this year, when the sea came right over the cliffs, the waves were so big. Maybe I'll take the children out in my fishing-boat if they're well behaved."

"Thank you," said Hilary. But they all looked very disappointed, because going out in somebody else's boat wasn't a bit the same as having their own.

"We'll just go back to old Mrs. Polsett's shop and see if she knows of anyone else with a boat," said Mother. So back they went.

But the old lady shook her head.

"The only other person who has a boat—and it's not much of a boat, all patched and mended," she said, "is Smuggler Ben."

"Smuggler Ben!" said Alec. "Is there a smuggler here? Where does he live?"

"Oh, he's not a real smuggler!" said Mrs. Polsett, with a laugh. "He's my grandson. But he's just mad on tales of the old-time smugglers, and he likes to pretend he's one. There were smugglers' caves here, you know, somewhere about the beach. I dare say Ben knows them. Nobody else does now."

The children felt terribly excited. Smugglers—and caves! And who was Smuggler Ben? They felt that they would very much like to know him. And he had a boat, too. He would be a fine person to know!

"Is Smuggler Ben grown-up?" asked Alec.

"Bless you, no!" said Mrs. Polsett. "He's much about the same age as you. Look—there he goes—down the street there!"

The children turned to look. And as soon as they saw the boy, their hearts sank.

"It's the nasty boy with the knife!" said Hilary sadly. "*He* won't lend us his boat."

"Don't you worry about his knife," said old Mrs. Polsett. "It's all pretence with him. He's just play-acting most of the time. He always wishes he could have been a smuggler, and he's for ever pretending he is one. There's no harm in him. He's a good boy for work—and when he wants to play, well, let him play as he likes, I say! He doesn't get into mischief like most boys do. He goes off exploring the cliffs, and rows in his boat half the time. But he does keep himself to himself. Shall I ask him if he'll lend you his boat sometimes?"

"No, thank you," said Alec politely. He was sure the boy would refuse rudely, and Alec wasn't going to give him the chance to do that.

They walked back to Sea Cottage. They felt sad about the boat—but their spirits rose as they saw their bathing-costumes lying on the grass, bone-dry.

"What about another bathe before lunch?" cried Alec. "Come on, Mother. You must come, too!"

So down to the sea they all went again, and by the squeals, shrieks and shouts, four people had a really wonderful time!

CHAPTER 3

HILARY HAS AN ADVENTURE

One evening, after tea, Frances and Alec wanted to go for a long walk. "Coming, Hilary?" they said. Hilary shook her head.

"No," she said. "I'm a bit tired with all my swimming to-day. I'll take a book and go and sit on the cliff-top till you come back."

So Alec went off with Frances, and Hilary took her book and went to find a nice place to sit. She could see miles and miles of restless blue sea from the cliff. It was really marvellous. She walked on the cliff-edge towards the east, found a big gorse bush and sat down beside it for shelter. She opened her book.

When she looked up, something nearby caught her eye. It looked like a little-worn path going straight to the cliff-edge. "A rabbit path, I suppose," said Hilary to herself. "But fancy the rabbits going right over the steep cliff-edge like that! I suppose there must be a hole there that they pop into."

She got up to look—and to her great surprise saw what looked like a narrow, rocky path going down the cliff-side, very steep indeed! In a sandy ledge a little way down was the print of a bare foot.

"Well, *someone* has plainly gone down this steep path!" thought Hilary. "I wonder who it was. I wonder where it leads to. I've a good mind to find out!"

She began to go down the path. It really was very steep and rather dangerous. At one extremely dangerous part someone had driven in iron bars and stretched a piece of strong rope from bar to bar. Hilary was glad to get hold of it, for her feet were sliding down by themselves and she was afraid she was going to fall.

When she was about three-quarters of the way down she heard the sound of someone whistling very quietly. She stopped and tried to peer down to see who was on the beach.

“Why, this path leads down to that little cove we saw the other day!” she thought excitedly. “The one where the rude boy was. Oh, I hope he isn’t there now!”

He was! He was sitting on his upturned boat, whittling at something with his sharp knife. Hilary turned rather pale when she saw the knife. It was all very well for old Mrs. Polsett to say that her grandson was only play-acting—but Hilary was sure that Ben really felt himself to be somebody fierce—and he might act like that, too.

As she stood and watched him, unseen, she saw the sharp knife slip. The boy gave a cry of pain and clutched his left hand. He had cut it very badly indeed. Blood began to drip on to the sand.

The boy felt in his pocket for something to bind up his hand. But he could find nothing. He pressed the cut together, but it went on bleeding. Hilary was tender-hearted and she couldn’t bear to see the boy’s face all screwed up in pain, and do nothing about it.

She forgot to be afraid of him. She went down the last piece of cliff and jumped down on the sand. The boy heard her and turned, his face one big scowl. Hilary ran up to him.

She had a big clean handkerchief in her pocket, and she took this out. “I’ll tie up your hand for you,” she said. “I say—what an *awful* cut! I should howl like anything if I did that to myself.”

The boy scowled at her again. “What are you doing here?” he said. “Where are the others?”

“I’m alone,” said Hilary. “I found that funny steep path and came down it to see where it led to. And I saw you cut your hand. Give it to me. Come on, Ben—hold it out and let me tie it up. You might bleed to death if you go on like this.”

The boy held out his cut hand. "How do you know my name is Ben?" he said, in a surly voice.

"Never mind how I know!" said Hilary. "You're Smuggler Ben! What a marvellous name! Don't you wish you really *were* a smuggler? I do! I'm just reading a book about smuggling and it's terribly exciting."

"What book?" asked the boy.

Hilary bound up his hand well, and then showed him the book. "It's all about hidden caves and smugglers coming in at night and things like that," she said. "I'll lend it to you if you like."

The boy stared at her. He couldn't help liking this little girl with her straight eyes and clear, kind little voice. His hand felt much more comfortable now, too. He was grateful to her. He took the book and looked through the pages.

"I'd like to read it after you," he said, more graciously. "I can't get enough books. Do you really like smuggling and that kind of thing?"

"Of course," said Hilary. "I like anything adventurous like that. Is it true that there are smuggler's caves along this coast somewhere?"

The boy stopped before he answered. "If I tell you, will you keep it a secret?" he said at last.

"Well—I could tell the others, couldn't I?" said Hilary. "We all share everything, you know, Alec and Frances and I."

"No, I don't want you to tell anyone," said the boy. "It's my own secret. I wouldn't mind sharing it with you, because you've helped me, and you like smuggling, too. But I don't want the others to know."

"Then don't tell me," said Hilary, disappointed. "You see, it would be mean of me to keep an exciting thing like that from the others. I just couldn't do it. You'd know how I feel if you had brothers and sisters. You just have to share exciting things."

"I haven't got any brothers or sisters," said the boy. "I wish I had. I always play alone. There aren't any boys of my

age in our village—only girls, and I don't like girls. They're silly."

"Oh well, if you think that, I'll go," said Hilary offended. She turned to go, but the boy caught her arm.

"No, don't go. I didn't mean that *you* were silly. I don't think you are. I think you're sensible. Let me tell you one of my secrets."

"Not unless I can share it with the others," said Hilary. "I'm simply longing to know—but I don't want to leave the others out of it."

"Are they as sensible as you are?" asked Ben.

"Of course," said Hilary. "As a matter of fact, Frances, my sister, is nicer than I am. I'm always losing my temper and she doesn't. You can trust us, Ben, really you can."

"Well," said Ben slowly, "I'll let you all into my secret then. I'll show you something that will make you stare! Come here to-morrow, down that little path. I'll be here, and just see if I don't astonish you."

Hilary's eyes shone. She felt excited. She caught hold of Ben's arm and looked at him eagerly.

"You're a sport!" she said. "I like you, Smuggler Ben. Let's all be smugglers, shall we?"

Ben smiled for the first time. His brown face changed completely, and his dark eyes twinkled. "All right," he said. "We'll all be. That would be more fun than playing alone, if I can trust you all not to say a word to any grown-up. They might interfere. And now I'll tell you one little secret—and you can tell the others if you like. I know where the old smugglers' caves are!"

"Ben!" cried Hilary, her eyes shining with excitement. "Do you really? I wondered if you did. Oh, I say, isn't that simply marvellous! Will you show us them to-morrow? Oh, do say you will."

"You wait and see," said Ben. He turned his boat the right way up and dragged it down the beach.

"Where are you going?" called Hilary.

“Back home in my boat,” said Ben. “I’ve got to go out fishing with my uncle to-night. Would you like to come back in my boat with me? It’ll save you climbing up that steep path.”

“Oh, I’d love to!” said Hilary joyfully. “You know, Ben, we tried and tried to hire a boat of our own, but we couldn’t. We were so terribly disappointed. Can I get in? You push her out.”

Ben pushed the boat out on to the waves and then got in himself. But when he took the oars he found that his cut hand was far too painful to handle the left oar. He bit his lip and went a little pale under his tan.

“What’s the matter?” said Hilary. “Oh, it’s your hand. Well, let me take the oars. I can row. Yes, I can, Ben! You’ll only make your cut bleed again.”

Ben gave up his seat and the girl took the oars. She rowed very well indeed, and the oars cut cleanly into the water. The boat flew along over the waves.

“You don’t row badly for a girl,” said Ben.

“Well, we live near a river at home,” said Hilary, “and we are often out in our uncle’s boat. We can all row. So you can guess how disappointed we were when we found that we couldn’t get a boat here for ourselves.”

Ben was silent for a little while. Then he spoke again. “Well—I don’t mind lending you my boat sometimes, if you like. When I’m out fishing, you can have it—but don’t you dare to spoil it in any way. I know it’s only an old boat, but I love it.”

Hilary stopped rowing and looked at Ben in delight. “I say, you really are a brick!” she said. “Do you mean it?”

“I always mean what I say,” said Ben gruffly. “You lend me your books—and I’ll lend you my boat.”

Hilary rowed all round the cliffs until she came to the beach she knew. She rowed inshore and the two got out. She and Ben pulled the boat right up the beach and turned it upside down.

"I must go now," said Ben. "My uncle's waiting for me. See you to-morrow."

He went off, and Hilary turned to go home. At the top of the beach she saw Frances and Alec staring at her in amazement.

"Hilary! Were you with that awful boy in his boat?" cried Frances. "However did you dare?"

"He isn't awful after all," said Hilary. "He's quite nice. He's got wonderful secrets—simply wonderful. And he says we can use his boat when he doesn't want it!"

The other two stared open-mouthed. They simply couldn't believe all this. Why, that boy had threatened them with a knife—he couldn't possibly be nice enough to lend them his boat.

"I'll tell you all about it," said Hilary, as they set off up the cliff-path. "You see, I found a little secret way down to that cove we saw—and Ben was there."

She told them the whole story and they listened in silence.

"Things always happen to you, Hilary," said Frances, rather enviously. "Well, I must say this is all very exciting. I can hardly wait till to-morrow. Do you really think Smuggler Ben will show us those caves? I wonder where they are? I hope they aren't miles away!"

"Well, we'll see," said Hilary happily. They went home hungry to their supper—and in bed that night each of them dreamt of caves and smugglers and all kinds of exciting things. This holiday promised to be more thrilling than they had imagined!

CHAPTER 4

AN EXCITING EVENING

The children told their mother about Ben. She was amused.

"So the fierce little boy has turned out to be quite ordinary after all!" she said. "Well, I must say I'm glad. I didn't very much like to think of a little savage rushing about the shore armed with a sharp knife. I think it's very nice of him to lend you his boat. You had better bring him in to a meal, and then I can see him for myself."

"Oh, thanks, Mother," said Hilary. "I say—do you think we could get ourselves some fishermen's hats, like Ben wears—and have you got a bright-coloured scarf or sash that you could lend us, Mother? Or three, if you've got them. We're going to play smugglers, and it would be fun to dress up a bit. Ben does. He looks awfully grand in his tasselled hat and sash and big boots."

"Hilary, you don't seriously think I am going to hand you out all my precious scarves, do you?" said Mother. "I'll give you some money to go and buy three cheap hats and scarves with, if you like—and you can all wear your wellingtons if you want big boots. But I draw the line at getting you sharp knives like Ben. Look how even he cut himself to-day!"

The children were delighted to think they could buy something they could dress up in. The next morning they set off to Mrs. Polsett's and asked to see fishermen's hats. She had a few and brought them out. "I knitted them myself," she said. "Here's a red one with a yellow tassel. That would suit you fine, Miss Hilary."

So it did. Hilary pulled it on and swung the tasselled end over her left ear just as she had seen Ben do.

Frances chose a blue one with a red tassel and Alec chose a green one with a brown tassel. Then they bought some very cheap scarves to tie round their waists.

They went back home, pulled on their wellingtons, and put on their hats and sashes.

They looked grand.

Hilary showed them where the little narrow path ran down the steep cliff.

"Goodness," said Alec, peering over the edge. "What a terrifying way down! I feel half-afraid of falling. I'm sure I can never get down those steep bits."

"There's a rope tied there," said Hilary, going down first. "Come on. Ben will be waiting. I saw his boat out on the water as we came along the cliff."

They all went down the path, slowly for fear of falling. When they jumped down the last rocky step into the little cove, they saw Ben there waiting for them, sitting on his little boat. He was dressed just as they were, except that his boots were real seaboots, and he wore trousers tucked well down into them. He didn't move as they came up, nor did he smile.

"Hallo, Ben!" said Hilary. "I've brought my brother and sister as you said I could. This is Alec, and this is Frances. I've told them what you said. We're all terribly excited."

"Did you tell them it's all a deep secret?" said Ben, looking at Hilary. "They won't give it away?"

"Of course we won't," said Alec indignantly. "That would spoil all the fun. I say—can we call you Smuggler Ben? It sounds fine."

Ben looked pleased. "Yes, you can," he said. "And remember, I'm the captain. You've got to obey my orders."

"Oh," said Alec, not liking this idea quite so much. "Well—all right. Lead on. Show us your secret."

"You know, don't you, that there really were smugglers here in the old days?" said Ben. "They came up the coast quietly on dark nights, bringing in all kinds of goods. Folk

here knew they came, but they were afraid of them. They used to take the goods to the old caves here, and hide them there till they could get rid of them overland."

"And do you really know where the caves are?" said Alec eagerly. "My word, Smuggler Ben—you're a wonder!"

Smuggler Ben smiled and his brown face changed at once. "Come on," he said. "I'll show you something that will surprise you!"

He led the way up the beach to the cliffs at the back. "Now," he said, "the entrance to the old caves is somewhere in this little cove. Before I show you, see if you can find it!"

"In this cove!" cried Hilary. "Oh, I guess we shall soon find it then!"

The three children began to hunt carefully along the rocky cliff. They ran into narrow caves and out again. They came to a big cave, went into that and came out again. It seemed nothing but a large cave, narrowing at the back. There were no more caves after that one, and the children turned in disappointment to Ben.

"You don't mean that these little caves and that one big one are the old smuggling caves do you?" said Hilary.

"Because they are just like heaps of other caves we have seen at the seaside."

"No, I don't mean that," said Ben. "Now you come with me and I'll show you something exciting."

He led them into the big cave. He took them to the right of it and then jumped up to a rocky ledge which was just about shoulder high. In half a moment he had completely disappeared! Hilary felt about on the ledge and called to him in bewilderment.

"Ben! Smuggler Ben! Where have you gone?"

There was no answer. The three children stared up at the ledge. Alec jumped up to it. He felt all along it, up and down and sideways. He simply couldn't imagine where Ben had gone to!

There was a low laugh behind them. The children turned in surprise—and there was Ben, standing at the entrance to the big cave, laughing all over his brown face at their surprise.

“Ben! What happened? Where did you disappear to? And how did you get back to the entrance without us seeing you?” cried Hilary. “It’s like magic. Do tell us. Quick!”

“Well, I’ll show you,” said Ben. “I found it out quite by accident. One day I came into this cave and fell asleep. When I woke up, the tide was high and was already coming into the cave. I was trapped. I couldn’t possibly get out, because I knew I’d be dashed to pieces against the rocks outside, the sea was so stormy.”

“So you climbed up on to this ledge!” cried Hilary.

“Yes, I did,” said Ben. “It was the only thing to do. I just hoped and hoped the sea wouldn’t fill the cave up completely, or I knew I’d be drowned. Well, I crouched there for ages, the sea getting higher and higher up till it reached that ledge.”

“Gracious!” said Frances, shivering. “You must have been afraid.”

“I was, rather,” said Ben. “Well, I rolled right to the back of the ledge, and put up my hand to catch hold of any bit of jutting-out rock that I could—and instead of knocking against rock, my hand went into space!”

“What do you mean?” said Alec, in astonishment.

“Come and see,” said Ben, and he took a torch out of his pocket. All the children climbed on to the ledge, and squeezed together there, watching the beam of Ben’s torch. He directed it upwards—and then, to their amazement, they saw a perfectly round hole going upwards right at the far corner of the rocky ledge. It didn’t look very big.

“See that?” said Ben. “Well, when I felt my hand going up that hole I slid over to this corner and put my arm right up the hole. And this is what I found.”

He shone his torch up the rounded hole in the rock. The three children peered up, one after another.

Driven into the rock were great thick nails, one above the other. "See those?" said Ben. "Well, I reckon they were put there by some old-time smuggler."

"Did you get up the hole?" asked Alec.

"You bet I did!" said Ben. "And pretty quick, too, for the sea was washing inches above the ledge by that time and I was soaked through. I squeezed myself up, got my feet on those nails—they're sort of steps up, you see—and climbed up the hole by feeling for the nails with my feet."

"Where does the hole lead to?" asked Frances, in excitement.

"You'd better come and see," said Ben, with a sudden grin. The children asked nothing better than that, and at once Alec put his head up the hole. It was not such a tight fit as he expected. He was easily able to climb up. There were about twenty nails for footholds and then they stopped. There was another ledge to climb out on. The boy dragged himself there, and looked down.

"Can't see a thing!" he called. "Come on up, Smuggler Ben, and bring your torch."

"I'll give Hilary my torch," said Ben. "She can shine it for you up there when she's up, and shine it down for us to climb up by, too. Go on, Hilary."

So Hilary went up next with the torch—and when she shone it around her at the top, she and Alec gave a shout of astonishment.

They were on a ledge near the ceiling of a most enormous cave. It looked almost as big as a church to the children. The floor was of rock, not of sand. Queer lights shone in the walls. They came from the twinkling bits of metal in the rocks.

"Frances! Hurry," cried Hilary. "It's marvellous here."

Soon all four children were standing on the ledge, looking down into the great cave. In it, on the floor, were many

boxes of all kinds—small, big, square, oblong. Bits of rope were scattered about, too, and an old broken lantern lay in a corner.

“*Real* smugglers have been here!” said Hilary, in a whisper.

“What are you whispering for?” said Alec, with a laugh. “Afraid they will hear you?”

“No—but it all seems so mysterious,” said Hilary. “Let’s get down to the floor of the cave. How do we get there?”

“Jump,” said Ben.

So they jumped. They ran to the boxes and opened the lids.

“No good,” said Ben. “I’ve done that long ago. They’re quite empty. I often come to play smugglers here when I’m by myself. Isn’t it a fine place?”

“Simply marvellous!” said Alec. “Let’s all come here and play to-morrow. We can bring candles and something to eat and drink. It would be gorgeous.”

“Oooh, yes,” said Hilary. So they planned everything in excitement, and then climbed back to the ledge, and down through the hole into the first cave. Out they went into the sunshine. Ben smiled as much as the rest.

“It’s fun to share my secret with you,” he told the others half shyly. “It will be grand to play smugglers all together, instead of just by myself. I’ll bring some sandwiches to-morrow, and some plums. You bring anything you can, too. It shall be our own secret smuggler’s cave—and we’re the smugglers!”

CHAPTER 5

YET ANOTHER SECRET

The next day the four children met together in the big cave. They felt very thrilled as they climbed up the hole and then jumped down into the smuggler's cave. They had brought candles and food with them, and Alec had bottles of homemade lemonade on his back in a leather bag.

They played smugglers to their hearts' content. Ben ordered them about, and called them "My men," and everyone enjoyed the game thoroughly. At last Alec sat down on a big box and said he was tired of playing.

"I'd like something to eat," he said. "Let's use this big box for a table."

They set the things out on the table. And then Hilary looked in a puzzled way at the box.

"What's up?" asked Alec, seeing her look.

"Well, I'm just wondering something," said Hilary. "How in the world did the smugglers get this big box up the small round hole to this cave? After all, that hole only just takes us comfortably—surely this box would never have got through it."

Frances and Alec stared at the box. They felt puzzled, too. It was quite certain that no one could have carried such a big box through the hole. They looked at Ben.

"Have you ever thought of that!" Alec asked him.

"Plenty of times," said Ben. "And, what's more, I know the answer!"

"Tell us!" begged Hilary. "Is there another way into this cave?"

Smuggler Ben nodded. "Yes," he said. "I'll show it to you if you like. I just wanted to see if any of my three men were clever enough to think of such a thing. Come on—I'll show

you the other way in. Didn't you wonder yesterday how it was that I came back into the other cave after I'd disappeared up the hole?"

He stood up and the others rose, too, all excited. Ben went to the back of the cave. It seemed to the children as if the wall there was quite continuous—but it wasn't. There was a fold in it—and in the fold was a passage! It was wide, but low, and the children had to crouch down almost double to get into it. But almost immediately it rose high and they could stand. Smuggler Ben switched on his torch, and the children saw that the passage was quite short and led into yet another cave. This was small and ran right down to the rocky side of the cliff very steeply, more like a wide passage than a cave.

The children went down the long cave and came to a rocky inlet of water. "When the tide comes in, it sweeps right through this cave," said Ben, "and I reckon that this is where the smugglers brought in their goods—by boat. The boat would be guided into this watery passage at high tide, and beached at the far end, where the tide didn't reach. Then the things could easily be taken into the big cave. The smugglers left a way of escape for themselves down the hole we climbed through from the first cave—you know, where the nails are driven into the rock."

"This gets more and more exciting!" said Alec. "Anything more, Ben? Don't keep it from us. Tell us everything!"

"Well, there is one thing more," said Ben, "but it just beats me. Maybe the four of us together could do something about it though. Come along and I'll show you."

He led them back to the little passage between the big cave and the one they were in. He climbed up the wall a little way, and then disappeared. The others followed him.

There was another passage leading off into the darkness there, back into the cliff. Ben shone his torch down it as the others crowded on his heels.

"Let's go up it!" cried Alec excitedly.

“We can’t,” said Ben, and he shone his torch before him. “The passage walls have fallen in just along there—look!”

So they had. The passage ended in a heap of stones, soil and sand. It was completely blocked up.

“Can’t we clear it?” cried Alec.

“Well, we might, as there are so many of us,” said Ben. “I didn’t feel like tackling it all by myself, I must say. For one thing I didn’t know how far back the passage was blocked. It might have fallen in for a long way.”

“I wonder where it leads to,” said Alec. “It seems to go straight back. I say— isn’t this thrilling!”

“We’ll come and dig it out to-morrow,” said Hilary, her eyes dancing. “We’ll bring our spades—and a sack or something to put the stones and soil in. Then we can drag it away and empty it.”

“Be here to-morrow after tea,” said Smuggler Ben, laughing. “I’ll bring my uncle’s big spade. That’s a powerful one—it will soon dig away the soil.”

So the next day the children crowded into the cave with spades and sacks. They used the ordinary way in, climbing up the hole by the nails and jumping into the cave from the high ledge. Then they made their way into the low passage, and climbed up where the roof rose high, till they came to the blocked-up passage. They went on by the light of their torches and came to the big fall of stones and soil.

“Now, men, to work!” said Smuggler Ben, and the gang set to work with a will. The boys shovelled away the soil and stones, and the girls filled the sacks. Then the boys dragged them down the passage, let them fall to the opening between the two caves, climbed down, dragged the sacks into the large cave and emptied them into a corner. Then back they went again to do some more digging.

“What’s the time?” said Alec at last. “I feel as if we’ve been working for hours. We mustn’t forget that high tide is at half-past seven. We’ve got to get out before then.”

Hilary looked at her watch. "It's all right," she said. "It's only half-past six. We've plenty of time."

"Gracious! Hasn't the time gone slowly!" said Frances in surprise. "Come on—we can do a lot more!"

They went on working, and after a time Ben began to feel rather uncomfortable. "Hilary, what's the time now?" he said. "I'm sure it must be getting near high tide."

Hilary glanced at her watch again. "It's half-past six," she said, in surprise.

"But you said that before!" cried Ben. "Has your watch stopped?"

It had! Hilary held it to her ear and cried out in dismay. "Yes! It's stopped. Oh, blow! I wonder what the right time is."

"Quick! We'd better go and see how the tide is," said Ben, and he dropped his spade and rushed to the entrance of the blocked-up passage. He dropped down and went into the big cave, and then climbed up to the ledge, and then down by the nail-studded hole on to the ledge in the first cave.

But even as he climbed down to the ledge, he felt the wash of water over his foot. "Golly! The tide's almost in!" he yelled. "We're caught! We can't get out!"

He climbed back and stood in the big cave with the others. They looked at him, half-frightened.

"Don't be scared," said Smuggler Ben. "It only means we'll have to wait a few hours till the tide goes down. I hope your mother won't worry."

"She's out to-night," said Alec. "She won't know. Does the water come in here, Ben?"

"Of course not," said Ben. "This cave is too high up. Well—let's sit down, have some chocolate and a rest, and then we might as well get on with our job."

Time went on. The boys went to see if the tide was falling, but it was still very high. It was getting dark outside. The boys stood at the end of the long, narrow cave, up which the sea now rushed deeply. And as they stood there, they heard a strange noise coming nearer and nearer.

“Whatever’s that?” said Alec, in astonishment.

“It sounds like a motor boat,” said Ben.

“It can’t be,” said Alec.

But it was. A small motor boat suddenly loomed out of the darkness and worked itself very carefully up the narrow passage and into the long cave, which was now full of deep water! The boys were at first too startled to move. They heard men and women talking in low voices.

“Is this the place?”

“Yes—step out just there. Wait till the wave goes back. That’s it—now step out.”

Ben clutched hold of Alec’s arm and pulled him silently away, back into the entrance between the caves. Up they went in the blocked passage. The girls called out to them: “What’s the tide like?”

“Sh!” said Smuggler Ben, so fiercely that the girls were quite frightened. They stared at Ben with big eyes. The boy told them in a whisper what he and Alec had seen.

“Something’s going on,” he said mysteriously. “I don’t know what. But it makes me suspicious when strange motor boats come to our coasts late at night like this and run into a little-known cave. After all, our country is at war—they may be up to no good, these people. They may be enemies!”

All the children felt a shivery feeling down their backs when Ben said this. Hilary felt that it was just a bit *too* exciting. “What do you mean?” she whispered.

“I don’t exactly know,” said Ben. “All I know for certain is that it’s plain somebody else knows of these caves and plans to use them for something. I don’t know what. And it’s up to us to find out!”

“Oooh! I wish we could!” said Hilary at once. “What are we going to do now? Wait here?”

“Alec and I will go down to the beginning of this passage,” said Ben. “Maybe the people don’t know about it. We’ll see if we can hear what they say.”

So they crept down to the beginning of the passage and leaned over to listen. Three or four people had now gone into the big cave, but to Ben's great disappointment they were talking in a strange language, and he could not understand a word.

Then came something he *did* understand! One of the women spoke in English. "We will bring them on Thursday night," she said. "When the tide is full."

Another man answered. Then the people went back to their motor boat, and the boys soon heard the whirring of the engine as it made its way carefully out of the long, narrow cave.

"They're using that cave rather like a boathouse," said Ben. "Golly, I wonder how they knew about it. And what are they bringing in on Thursday night?"

"Smuggled goods, do you think?" said Alec, hot with excitement. "People always smuggle things in wartime. Mother said so. They're smugglers, Ben—smugglers of nowadays! And they're using the old smugglers' caves again. I say— isn't this awfully exciting?"

"Yes, it is," said Smuggler Ben. "We'd better come here on Thursday night, Alec. We'll have to see what happens. We simply must. Can you slip away about midnight, do you think?"

"Of course!" said Alec. "You bet! And the girls, too! We'll all be here! And we'll watch to see exactly what happens. Fancy spying on real smugglers, Ben. What a thrill!"

CHAPTER 6

A QUEER DISCOVERY

Mother was in by the time the children got back home, and she was very worried indeed about them.

"Mother, it's all right," said Alec, going over to her. "We just got caught by the tide, that's all, playing in caves. But we were quite safe. We just waited till the tide went down."

"Now listen, Alec," said Mother, "this just won't do. I shall forbid you to play in those caves if you get caught another time, and worry me like this. I imagined you all drowning or something."

"We're awfully sorry, Mother," said Hilary, putting her arms round her. "Really, we wouldn't have worried you for anything. Look—my watch stopped at half-past six, and that put us all wrong about the tide."

"Very well," said Mother. "I'll forgive you this time—but I warn you, if you worry me again like this, you won't be allowed to set foot in a single cave!"

The next day it poured with rain, which was very disappointing. Alec ran down to the village to see what Ben was doing. The two boys talked excitedly about what had happened the night before.

"Mother says will you come and spend the day with us?" said Alec. "Do come. You'll like Mother, she's a dear."

The two boys went back to Sea Cottage. The girls welcomed them, and Mother shook hands with Ben very politely.

"I'm glad you can come for the day," she said. "You'd better go up to the girls' bedroom and play there. I want the sitting-room to do some writing in this morning."

So they all went up to the bedroom above, and sat down to talk. "It's nice of Mother to send us up here," said Hilary.

"We can talk in peace. What are our plans for Thursday, Captain?"

"Well, I don't quite know," said Ben slowly. "You see, we've got to be there at midnight, haven't we?—but we simply must be there a good time before that, because of the tide. You see, we can't get into either cave if the tide is up. We'd be dashed to pieces."

The children stared at Smuggler Ben in dismay. None of them had thought of that.

"What time would we have to be there?" asked Alec.

"We'd have to be there about half-past nine, as far as I can reckon," said Ben. "Can you leave by that time? What would your mother say?"

"Mother wouldn't let us, I'm sure of that," said Hilary, in disappointment. "She was so dreadfully worried about us last night. I'm quite sure if we told her what we wanted to do, she would say 'No' at once."

"She isn't in bed by that time, then?" said Ben.

The children shook their heads. All four were puzzled and disappointed. They couldn't think how to get over the difficulty. There was no way out of the cottage except through the sitting-room door—and Mother would be in the room, writing or reading, at the time they wanted to go out.

"What about getting out of the window?" said Alec, going over to look. But that was quite impossible, too. It was too far to jump, and, anyway, Mother would be sure to hear any noise they made.

"It looks as if I'll have to go alone," said Ben gloomily. "It's funny—I used to like doing everything all by myself, you know—but now I don't like it at all. I want to be with my three men!"

"Oh, Ben—it would be awful thinking of you down in those caves finding out what was happening—and us in our bed, wanting and longing to be with you!" cried Hilary.

"Well, I simply don't know what else to do," said Ben. "If you can't come, you can't. And certainly I wouldn't let you

come after your mother had gone to bed, because by that time the tide would be up, and you'd simply be washed away as soon as you put foot on the beach. No—I'll go alone—and I'll come and tell you what's happened the next morning."

The children felt terribly disappointed and gloomy. "Let's go downstairs into that little study place that's lined with books," said Hilary at last. "I looked into one of the books the other day, and it seemed to be all about this district in the old days. Maybe we might find some bits about smugglers."

Ben brightened up at once. "That would be fine," he said. "I know Professor Rondel was supposed to have a heap of books about this district. He was a funny man—never talked to anyone. I didn't like him."

The children went downstairs. Mother called out to them: "Where are you going?"

"Into the book-room," said Hilary, opening the sitting-room door. "We may, mayn't we?"

"Yes, but be sure to take care of any book you use, and put it back into its right place," said Mother. They promised this and then went into the little study.

"My word! What hundreds of books!" said Ben, in amazement. The walls were lined with them, almost from floor to ceiling. The boy ran his eyes along the shelves. He picked out a book and looked at it.

"Here's a book about the moors behind here," he said. "And maps, too. Look—I've been along here—and crossed that stream just there."

The children looked. "We ought to go for some walks with you over those lovely moors, Ben," said Alec. "I'd like that."

Hilary took down one or two books and looked through them, too, trying to find something exciting to read. She found nothing and put them back. Frances showed her a book on the top shelf.

“Look,” she said, “do you think that would be any good? It’s called *Old-Time Smugglers’ Haunts*.”

“It might be interesting,” said Hilary, and stood on a chair to get the book. It was big and old and smelt musty. The girl jumped down with it and opened it on the table. The first picture she saw made her cry out.

“Oh, look—here’s an old picture of this village! Here are the cliffs—and there are the old, old houses that the fishermen still live in!”

She was quite right. Underneath the picture was written: “A little-known smugglers’ haunt. See page 66.”

They turned to page sixty-six, and found printed there an account of the caves in the little cove on the beach. “The best-known smuggler of those days was a dark, fiery man named Smuggler Ben,” said the book. The children exclaimed in surprise and looked at Ben.

“How funny!” they cried. “Did you know that, Ben?”

“No,” said Ben. “My name is really Benjamin, of course, but everyone calls me Ben. I’m dark, too. I wonder if Smuggler Ben was an ancestor of mine—you know, some sort of relation a hundred or more years ago?”

“Quite likely,” said Alec. “I wish we could find a picture of him to see if he’s like you.”

But they couldn’t. They turned over the pages of the book and gave it up. But before they shut it Ben took hold of it. He had an idea.

“I just wonder if by chance there’s a mention of that blocked-up passage,” he said. “It would be fun to know where it comes out, wouldn’t it?”

He looked carefully through the book. He came again to page sixty-six, and looked at it closely. “Someone has written a note in the margin of this page,” he said, holding it up to the light. “It’s written in pencil, very faintly. I can hardly make it out.”

The children did make it out at last. “For more information, see page 87 of *Days of Smugglers*,” the note

said. The children looked at one another.

"That would be a book," said Alec, moving to the shelves. "Let's see who can find it first."

Hilary found it. She was always the sharpest of the three. It was a small book, bound in black, and the print was rather faded. She turned to page eighty-seven. The book was all about the district they were staying in, and on page eighty-seven was a description of the old caves. And then came something that excited the children very much. "Read it out, Ben, read it out!" cried Alec. "It's important."

So Ben read it out. "From a well-hidden opening between two old smuggler's caves is a curious passage, partly natural, partly man-made, probably by the smugglers themselves. This runs steadily upwards through the cliffs, and eventually stops not far from a little stream. A well-hidden hole leads upwards on to the moor. This was probably the way the smugglers used when they took their goods from the caves, over the country."

The children stared at one another, trembling with excitement. "So that's where the passage goes to!" said Alec. "My word—if only we could find the other end! Ben, have you any idea at all where it ends?"

"None at all," said Ben. "But it wouldn't be very difficult to find out! We know whereabouts the beginnings of the passage are—and if we follow a more or less straight line inland till we come to a stream on the moors, we might be able to spot the hole!"

"I say! Let's go now, at once, this very minute!" cried Hilary, shouting in her excitement.

"Shut up, silly," said Alec. "Do you want to tell everyone our secrets? It's almost dinner-time. We can't go now. But I vote we go immediately afterwards!"

"Professor Rondel must have known all about those caves," said Ben thoughtfully. "I suppose he couldn't have anything to do with the queer people we overheard last night? No—that's too far-fetched. But the whole thing is very

strange. I do hope we shall be able to find the entrance to the other end of that secret passage.”

Mother called the children at that moment. “Dinner!” she cried. “Come along, bookworms, and have a little something to eat.”

They were all hungry. They went to wash and make themselves tidy, and then sat down and ate a most enormous meal. Ben liked the children’s mother very much. She talked and laughed, and he didn’t feel a bit shy of her.

“You know, Alec and the girls really thought you were going after them with that knife of yours,” she said.

Ben went red. “I did feel rather fierce that day,” he said. “But it’s awful when people come and spoil your secret places, isn’t it? Now I’m glad they came, because they’re the first friends I’ve ever had. We’re having a fine time.”

Mother looked out of the window as the children finished up the last of the jam tarts.

“It’s clearing up,” she said. “I think you all ought to go out. It will be very wet underfoot but you can put on your wellingtons. Why don’t you go out on the moors for a change?”

“Oh yes, we will!” cried all four children at once. Mother was rather astonished.

“Well, you don’t usually welcome any suggestion of walking in the wet,” she said. “I believe you’ve got some sort of secret plan!”

But nobody told her what it was!

CHAPTER 7

GOOD HUNTING

After dinner the children put on their boots and macs. They pulled on their sou'westers, and said good-bye to their mother, and set off.

"Now for a good old hunt," said Ben. "First let's go to the cliff that juts over my little cove. Then we'll try to make out where the passage begins underground and set off from that spot."

It wasn't long before they were over the cove. The wind whipped their faces, and overhead the clouds scudded by. Ben went to about the middle of the cliff over the cove and stood there.

"I should say that the blocked-up passage runs roughly under here," he said. "Now let's think. Does it run quite straight from where it begins? It curves a bit, doesn't it?"

"Yes, but it soon curved back again to the blocked-up part," said Alec eagerly. "So you can count it about straight to there. Let's walk in a straight line from here till we think we've come over the blocked-up bit."

They walked over the cliff inland, foot-deep in purple heather. Then Ben stopped. "I reckon we must just about be over the blocked-up bit," he said. "Now listen—we've got to look for a stream. There are four of us. We'll all part company and go off in different directions to look for the stream. Give a yell if you find one."

Soon Alec gave a yell. "There's a kind of stream here! It runs along for a little way and then disappears into a sort of little gully. I expect it makes its way down through the cliff somewhere and springs out into the sea. Would this be the stream, do you think?"

Everyone ran to where Alec stood. Ben looked down at the little brown rivulet. It was certainly very small.

"It's been bigger once upon a time," he said, pointing to where the bed was dry and wide. "Maybe this is the one. There doesn't seem to be another, anyway."

"We'll hunt about around here for an opening of some sort," said Alec, his face red with excitement.

They all hunted about, and it was Hilary who found it—quite by accident!

She was walking over the heather, her eyes glancing round for any hole, when her foot went right through into space! She had trodden on what she thought was good solid ground, over which heather grew—but almost at once she sank on one knee as her foot went through some sort of hole!

"I say! My foot's gone through a hole here," she yelled. "Is it the one? It went right through it. I nearly sprained my ankle."

The others came up. Ben pulled Hilary up and then parted the heather to see. Certainly a big hole was there—and certainly it seemed to go down a good way.

The children tugged away at armfuls of heather and soon got the tough roots out. The sides of the hole fell away as they took out the heather. Ben switched his torch on when it was fairly large. There seemed to be quite a big drop down.

"We'd better slide down a rope," he said.

"We haven't got one," said Alec.

"I've got one round my waist," said Ben, and undid a piece of strong rope from under his red belt. A stout gorse bush stood not far off, and Ben wound it round the strong stem at the bottom, pricking himself badly but not seeming to feel it at all.

"I'll go down," he said. He took hold of the rope and lay down on the heather. Then he put his legs into the hole and let himself go, holding tightly to the rope. He slid into the hole, and went a good way down.

“See anything?” yelled Alec.

“Yes. There *is* an underground channel here of some sort!” came Ben’s voice, rather muffled. “I believe we’re on to the right one. Wait a minute. I’m going to kick away a bit with my feet, and get some of the loose soil away.”

After a bit Ben’s voice came again, full of excitement.

“Come on down! There’s a kind of underground channel, worn away by water. I reckon a stream must have run here at some time.”

One by one the excited children slipped down the rope. They found what Ben had said—a kind of underground channel or tunnel plainly made by water of some kind in far-off days. Ben had his torch and the others had theirs. They switched them on.

Ben led the way. It was a curious path to take. Sometimes the roof was so low that the children had to crouch down, and once they had to go on hands and knees. Ben showed them the marks of tools in places where rocks jutted into the channel.

“Those marks were made by the smugglers, I reckon,” he said. “They found this way and made it into a usable passage. They must have found it difficult getting some of their goods along here.”

“I expect they unpacked those boxes we saw and carried the goods on their backs in bags or sacks,” said Frances, seeing the picture clearly in her mind. “Ooooh—Isn’t it queer to think that heaps of smugglers have gone up this dark passage carrying smuggled goods years and years ago!”

They went on for a good way and then suddenly came to an impassable bit where the roof had fallen in. They stopped.

“Well, here we are,” said Ben, “we’ve come to the blocked-up part once more. Now the thing is—how far along is it blocked up—just a few yards, easy to clear—or a quarter of a mile?”

"I don't see how we can tell," said Alec. The four children stood and looked at the fallen stones and soil. It was most annoying to think they could get no farther.

"I know!" said Hilary suddenly. "I know! One of us could go in at the other end of the passage and yell. Then, if we can hear anything, we shall know the blockage isn't stretching very far!"

"Good idea, Hilary," said Ben, pleased. "Yes, that really *is* a good idea. I'd better be the one to go because I can go quickly. It'll take me a little time, so you must be patient. I shall yell loudly when I get up to the blocked bit, and then I shall knock on some stones with my spade. We did leave the spades there, didn't we?"

"We did," said Alec. "I say—this is getting awfully exciting, isn't it?"

Ben squeezed past the others and made his way up the channel. He climbed up the rope and sped off over the heather to the cliff-side. Down the narrow path he went, and jumped down into the cove.

Meanwhile, the others had sat down in the tunnel, to wait patiently for any noise they might hear.

"It will be terribly disappointing if we don't hear anything," said Frances. They waited and waited. It seemed ages to them.

And then suddenly they heard something! It was Ben's voice, rather muffled and faint, but still quite unmistakable: "Hallooooooooooooo! Hallooooooooooooo!"

Then came the sharp noise of a spade on rock: Crack! Crack! Crack!

"Hallooooooooooooo!" yelled back all three children, wildly excited. "Hallooooooooooooo!"

"COME—AND—JOIN—ME!" yelled Ben's voice. "COME—AND—JOIN—ME!"

"COMING, COMING, COMING!" shouted Alec, Hilary and Frances, and all three scrambled back up to the entrance of the hole, swarming up the rope like monkeys.

They tore over the heather back to the cliff-side and almost fell down the steep path. Down into the cove on the sand—in the big cave—up on to the ledge—up the nail-studded hole—out on the ledge in the enormous cave—down to the rocky floor—over to the passage between the two caves—up the wall—and into the blocked-up passage where Ben was impatiently waiting for them.

“You *have* been quick,” he cried. “I say—I could hear your voices quite well. The blocked piece can’t stretch very far. Isn’t that good? Do you feel able to tackle it hard now? If so, I believe we might clear it.”

“I could tackle anything!” said Alec, taking off his mac. “I could tackle the cliff itself!”

Everyone laughed. They were all pleased and excited, and felt able to do anything, no matter how hard it was.

“What’s the time?” suddenly said Alec, when they had worked hard for a time, loosening the soil and filling the sacks. “Mother’s expecting us in to tea, you know.”

“It’s a quarter-past four already,” said Hilary, in dismay. “We must stop. But we’ll come back after tea.”

They sped off to their tea, and Mother had to cut another big plateful of bread and butter because they finished up every bit. Then off they went again, back to their exciting task.

“I say, I say, I say!” suddenly cried Alec, making everyone jump. “I’ve just thought of something marvellous.”

“What?” asked everyone curiously.

“Well—if we can get this passage clear, we can come down it on Thursday night, from outside,” said Alec. “We don’t need to bother about the tides or anything. We can slip out at half-past eleven, go to the entrance on the moor and come down here and see what’s happening!”

“Golly! I never thought of that!” cried Hilary.

Ben grinned. “That’s fine,” he said. “Yes—you can easily do that. You needn’t disturb your mother at all. I think I’d better be here earlier, though, in case those people change

their plans and come before they say. Though I don't think they will, because if they come in by motor boat, they'll need high tide to get their boat into the long cave."

The children went on working at the passage. Suddenly Ben gave a shout of joy.

"We're through! My spade went right through into nothing just then! Where's my torch?"

He shone it in front of him, and the children saw that he had spoken the truth. The light of the torch shone beyond into the other side of the passage! There was only a small heap of fallen earth to manage now.

"I think we'll finish this," said Alec, though he knew the girls were tired out. "I can't leave that little bit till tomorrow! You girls can sit down and have a rest. Ben and I can tackle this last bit. It will be easy."

It was. Before another half-hour had gone by, the passage was quite clear, and the children were able to walk up and down it from end to end. They felt pleased with themselves.

"Now we'll have to wait till Thursday," sighed Alec. "Gosh, what a long time it is—a whole day and a night and then another whole day. I simply can't wait!"

But they had to. They met Ben the next day and planned everything. They could hardly go to sleep on Wednesday night, and when Thursday dawned they were all awake as early as the sun.

CHAPTER 8

THURSDAY EVENING

The day seemed very long indeed to the children—but they had a lovely surprise in the afternoon. Their father arrived, and with him he brought their Uncle Ned. Mother rushed to the gate to meet them as soon as she saw them, and the children shouted for joy.

Uncle Ned said he could stay a day or two, and Daddy said he would stay for a whole week.

“Where’s Uncle Ned going to sleep?” asked Alec. “In my room?”

In the ordinary way the boy would have been very pleased at the idea of his uncle sleeping in the same room with him—but to-night a grown-up might perhaps spoil things.

“Ned will have to sleep on the sofa in the sitting-room,” said Mother. “I don’t expect he will mind. He’s had worse places to sleep in this war!”

Both Daddy and Uncle Ned were in the Army. It was lucky they had leave just when the children were on holiday. They could share a bit of it, too! All the children were delighted.

“I say—how are we going to slip out at half-past eleven to-night if Uncle Ned is sleeping in the sitting-room?” said Hilary, when they were alone. “We shall have to be jolly careful not to wake him!”

“Well, there’s nothing for it but to creep through to the door,” said Alec. “And if he does wake, we’ll have to beg him not to tell tales of us.”

The night came at last. The children went to bed as usual, but not one of them could go to sleep. They lay waiting for the time to pass—and it passed so slowly that once or twice Hilary thought her watch must have stopped. But it hadn’t.

At last half-past eleven came—the time when they had arranged to leave, to go to meet Ben in the passage above the caves. Very quietly the children dressed. They all wore shorts, jerseys, their smugglers' hats, sashes and rubber boots. They stole down the stairs very softly. Not a stair creaked, not a child coughed.

The door of the sitting-room was a little open. Alec pushed it a little farther and put his head in. The room was dark. On the sofa Uncle Ned was lying, his regular breathing telling the children that he was asleep.

"He's asleep," whispered Alec, in a low voice. "I'll go across first and open the door. Then you two step across quietly to me. I'll shut the door after us."

The boy went across the room to the door. He opened it softly. He had already oiled it that day, by Ben's orders, and it made no sound. A streak of moonlight came in.

Silently the three children passed out and Alec shut the door. Just as they were going through the door, their uncle woke. He opened his eyes—and to his very great amazement saw the figures of the three children going quietly out of the open door. Then it shut.

Uncle Ned sat up with a jerk. Could he be dreaming? He opened the door and looked out. No—he wasn't dreaming. There were the three figures hurrying along to the moor in the moonlight. Uncle Ned was more astonished than he had ever been in his life before.

"Now what in the world do these kids think they are doing?" he wondered. "Little monkeys slipping out like this just before midnight. What are they up to? I'll go after them and see. Maybe they'll let me join in their prank, whatever it is. Anyway, Alec oughtn't to take his two sisters out at this time of night!"

Uncle Ned pulled on a mackintosh over his pyjamas and set out down the lane after the children. They had no idea he was some way behind them. They were thrilled because

they thought they had got out so easily without being heard!

They got to the hole in the heather and by the light of their torch slid down the rope. Uncle Ned was more and more amazed as he saw one child after another slide down and disappear completely. He didn't know any hole was there, of course. He found it after a time and decided to go down it himself.

Meanwhile, the children were half-way down the passage. There they met Ben, and whispered in excitement to him. "We got out without being seen—though our uncle was sleeping on the sofa near the door! Ben, have you seen or heard anything yet?"

"Not a thing," said Ben. "But they should be here soon, because it's almost midnight and the tide is full."

They all went down to the end of the passage, and jumped down to stand at the end of the long, narrow cave. This was now full of water, and the waves rushed up it continually.

"Easy enough to float any motor boat right in," said Ben. "I wonder what they're bringing."

"Listen!" said Hilary suddenly. "I'm sure I can hear something."

"It's the chug-chug-chug of that motor boat again," whispered Alec, a shiver going down his back. He wasn't frightened, but it was all so exciting he couldn't help trembling. The girls were the same. Their knees shook a little. Only Ben was quite still and fearless.

"Now don't switch your torches on by mistake, for goodness' sake," whispered Ben, as the chugging noise came nearer. "We'll stay here till we see the boat coming into the long channel of this cave then we'll hop up into the passage and listen hard."

The motor boat came nearer and nearer. Then as it nosed gently into the long cave with its deep inlet of water, the engine was shut off.

“Now we must go,” said Ben, and the four children turned. They climbed up into the passage above the caves and stood there, listening.

People got out of the motor boat, which was apparently tied up to some rock. Torches were switched on. Ben, who was leaning over the hole from the passage, counted three people going into the big cave—two men and a woman. One of the men seemed somehow familiar to him, but he was gone too quickly for Ben to take a second look.

“Well, here we are,” said a voice from the enormous cave below. “I will leave you food and drink, and you will wait here till it is safe to go inland. You have maps to show you how to go. You know what to do. Do it well. Come back here and the motor boat will fetch you a week from now.”

The children listening above could not make out at all what was happening. Who were the people? And what were the two of them to do? Alec pressed hard by Ben to listen better. His foot touched a pebble and set it rolling down into the space between the caves. Before he could stop himself he gave a low cry of annoyance.

There was instant silence in the cave. Then the first voice spoke again very sharply: “What was that? Did you hear anything?”

A wave roared up the narrow cave nearby and made a great noise. Whilst the splashing was going on Ben whispered to Alec: “Move back up the passage, quick! You idiot, they heard you! They’ll be looking for us in a minute!”

The children hurried back along the passage as quietly as they could, their hearts beating painfully. And half-way along it they bumped into somebody!

Hilary screamed. Frances almost fainted with fright. Then the Somebody took their arms and said:

“Now what in the world are you kids doing here at this time of night?”

“Uncle Ned, oh, Uncle Ned!” said Hilary, in a faint voice. “Oh, it’s marvellous to have a grown-up just at this very

minute to help us! Uncle Ned, something very queer is going on. Tell him, Alec."

Alec told his astonished uncle very quickly all that had happened. He listened without a word, and then spoke in a sharp, stern voice that the children had never heard before.

"They're spies! They've come over from the coast of Ireland. It's just opposite here, you know. Goodness knows what they're going to do—some dirty work, I expect. We've got to stop them. Now let me think. How can we get them? Can they get away from the caves except by motor boat?"

"Only up this passage, until the tide goes down," said Ben. "Sir—listen to me. I could slip down the hole and cast off the motor boat by myself. I know how to start it up. I believe I could do it. Then you could hold this passage, couldn't you, and send Alec and the girls back to get their father. You'd have to get somebody to keep guard outside the cave as soon as the tide goes down, in case they try to escape round the cliffs."

"Leave that to me," said Uncle Ned grimly. "Can you really get away in that motor boat? If you can, you'll take their only means of escape. Well, go and try. Good luck to you. You're a brave lad!"

Ben winked at the others, who were staring at him open-mouthed. Then he slipped along down the passage again until he came to the opening. He stood there listening before he let himself down into the space between the caves. It was plain that the people there had come to the conclusion that the noise they had heard was nothing to worry about, for they were talking together. There was the clink of glasses as the boy dropped down quietly to the floor below the passage.

"They're wishing each other good luck!" said the boy to himself, with a grin. He went to the motor boat, which was gently bobbing up and down as waves ran under it up the inlet of water in the cave. He climbed quietly in. He felt about for the rope that was tied round a rock, and slipped it

loose. The next wave took the boat down with it, and as soon as he dared, Ben started up the engine to take her out of the deep channel in the cave.

He was lucky in getting the boat out fairly quickly. As soon as the engine started up, there came a shout from the cave, and Ben knew that the two men there had run to see what was happening. He ducked in case there was any shooting. He guessed that the men would be desperate when they saw their boat going.

He got the boat clear, and swung her out on the water that filled the cove. The boy knew the coast almost blindfold, and soon the little motor boat was chug-chug-chugging across the open sea towards the beach where a little jetty ran out, and where Ben could tie her up. He was filled with glee. It was marvellous to think he had beaten those men—and that woman, too, whoever she was. Spies! Well—now they knew what British boys and girls could do!

He wondered what the others were doing. He felt certain that Alec and the girls were even now speeding up the passage, climbing out through the heather and racing back home to waken their father.

And that is exactly what they *were* doing! They had left their uncle in the passage—and in his hand was his loaded revolver. No one could escape by that passage, even if they knew of it.

“Tell your father what you have told me, and tell him Ben has taken the boat away,” he said. “I want men to guard the outer entrance of the caves as soon as the tide goes down. I’ll remain here to guard this way of escape. Go quickly!”

CHAPTER 9

THINGS MOVE QUICKLY

Alec and the two girls left their uncle and stumbled up the dark passage, lighting their way by their small torches. All three were trembling with excitement. It seemed suddenly a very serious thing that was happening. Spies! Who would have thought of that?

They went on up the passage. Soon they came to the place where the roof fell very low indeed, and down they went on their hands and knees to crawl through the low tunnel.

"I don't like that bit much," said Frances, when they were through it. "I shall dream about that! Come on—we can stand upright again now. Whatever do you suppose Daddy and Mother will say?"

"I can't imagine," said Alec. "All I know is that it's a very lucky thing for us that Daddy and Uncle happened to be here now. Golly—didn't I jump when we bumped into Uncle Ned in this passage!"

"I screamed," said Hilary, rather ashamed of herself. "But honestly I simply couldn't help it. It was awful to bump into somebody strange like that in the darkness. But wasn't I glad when I heard Uncle Ned's voice!"

"Here we are at last," said Alec, as they came to where the rope hung down the hole. "I'll go up first and then give you two girls a hand. Give me a heave, Hilary."

Hilary heaved him up and he climbed the rope quickly, hand over hand, glad that he had been so good at gym at school. You never knew when things would come in useful!

He lay down on the heather and helped the girls up. They stood out on the moor in the moonlight, getting back their breath, for it wasn't easy to haul themselves up the rope.

“Now come on,” said Hilary. “We haven’t any time to lose. I shouldn’t be surprised if those spies know about the passage and make up their minds to try it. We don’t want to leave Uncle Ned too long. After all, it’s three against one.”

They tore over the heather, and came to the sandy lane where Sea Cottage shone in the moonlight. They went in at the open door and made their way to their parents’ bedroom. Alec hammered on the door, and then went in.

His father and mother were sitting up in astonishment. They switched on the light and stared at the three children, all fully dressed as they were.

“What’s the meaning of this?” asked their father. But before he could say a word more the three children began to pour out their story. At first their parents could not make out what they were talking about, and their mother made the girls stop talking so that Alec could tell the tale.

“But this is unbelievable!” said their father, dressing as quickly as possible. “Simply unbelievable! Is Ned really down a secret passage, holding three spies at bay? And Ben has gone off with their motor boat? Am I dreaming?”

“No, Daddy, you’re not,” said Alec. “It’s all quite true. We kept everything a secret till to-night, because secrets are such fun. We didn’t know that anything serious was up till to-night, really. Are you going to get help?”

“I certainly am,” said Daddy. He went to the telephone downstairs and was soon on to the nearest military camp. He spoke to a most surprised commanding officer, who listened in growing amazement.

“So you must send a few men over as quickly as possible,” said Daddy. “The children say there are three men in the caves—or rather, two men and one woman—but there may be more, of course—and more may arrive. We can’t tell. Hurry, won’t you?”

He put down the receiver of the telephone and turned to look at the waiting children. “Now let me see,” he said thoughtfully. “I shall want one of you to take me to where

Ned is—and I must leave someone behind to guide the soldiers down to the cove. They must be there to guard the entrance to the caves, so that if the spies try to escape by the beach, they will find they can't. Alec, you had better come with me. Frances and Hilary, you can go with Mother and the soldiers, when they come, and show them the way down the cliff and the entrance to the caves. Come along, Alec."

The two set off. Alec talked hard all the way, for there was a great deal to tell. His father listened in growing astonishment. Really, you never knew what children were doing half the time!

"I suppose your mother thought you were playing harmless games of smugglers," he said, "and all the time you were on the track of dangerous spies! Well, well, well!"

"We didn't really know they were spies till to-night," said Alec honestly. "It was all a game at first. Look, Daddy—here's the hole. We have to slide down this rope."

"This really is a weird adventure," said his father, and down the rope he went. Alec followed him. Soon they were standing beside Uncle Ned, who was still in the passage, his revolver in his hand.

"There's been a lot of excited talking," he said in a low voice to his brother, "and I think they've been trying to find a way out. But the tide is still very high, and they daren't walk out on the sand yet. If they don't know of this passage, they won't try it, of course—but we'd better stay here in case they do. When are the soldiers coming?"

"At once," said Daddy. "I've left the two girls behind to guide them down to the cove. Then they will hide, and guard the entrance to the caves, that is as soon as the tide goes down enough."

"Do the spies know you're here, Uncle Ned?" asked Alec, in a low voice.

"No," said his uncle. "They know someone has gone off with their motor boat, but that's all they know. What about

creeping down to the end of the passage to see if we can overhear anything? They might drop a few secrets!"

The three of them crept down to the end of the passage, and leaned out over the hole that led down to the space between the two caves. They could hear the waves still washing up the narrow channel in the long cave.

The two men and the woman were talking angrily. "Who could have known we were here? Someone has given the game away! No one but ourselves and the other three knew what we were planning to do."

"Is there no other way out?" said a man's impatient voice, very deep and foreign. "Rondel, you know all these caves and passages—or so you said. How did the old smugglers get their goods away? There must have been a land path they used."

"There was," said the other man. "There is a passage above this cave that leads on to the moors. But as far as I know it is completely blocked up."

"As far as you know!" said the other man, in a scornful voice. "Haven't you found out? What do you suppose you are paid for, Rondel? Aren't you paid for letting us know any well-hidden caves on this coast? Where is this passage? Do you know?"

"Yes, I know," said Rondel. "It's above this one, and the entrance to it is just between this cave and the one we used for the motor boat. We have to climb up a little way. I've never been up it myself, because I heard it was blocked up by a roof-fall years ago. But we can try it and see."

"We'd better get back up the passage a bit," whispered Alec's father. "If they come up here, we may have trouble. Get up to that bit where the big rock juts out and the passage goes round it. We can get behind that and give them a scare. They'll shoot if they see us. I don't want to shoot them if I can help it, for I've a feeling they will be more useful alive than dead!"

Very silently the three went back up the passage to where a rock jutted out and the way went round it. They crouched down behind the rock and waited, their torches switched off. Alec heard their breathing and it sounded very loud. But they had to breathe! He wondered if Daddy and Uncle could hear his heart beating, because it seemed to make a very loud thump just then!

Meanwhile, the three spies were trying to find the entrance to the passage. Rondel had a powerful torch, and he soon found the hole that led to the ledge where the secret passage began.

"Here it is!" he said. "Look—we can easily get up there. I'll go first."

Alec heard a scrambling noise as the man climbed up. Then he pulled up the other two. They all switched on their torches and the dark passage was lighted up brightly.

"It seems quite clear," said the other man. "I should think we could escape this way. You go ahead, Rondel. We'll follow. I can't see any sign of it being blocked up, I must say! This is a bit of luck."

They went on up the passage talking. They went slowly, and Alec and the others could hear their footsteps and voices coming gradually nearer. Alec's heart beat painfully and he kept swallowing something in his throat. The excitement was almost too much for him to bear.

The three spies came almost up to the jutting-out rock. And then they got the shock of their lives! Alec's father spoke in a loud, stern voice that made Alec jump.

"Halt! Come another step, and we'll shoot!"

The spies halted at once in a panic. They switched off their torches.

"Who's there?" came Rondel's voice.

Nobody answered. The spies talked together in low voices and decided to go back the way they had come. They were not risking going round that rock! They didn't know how

many people were there. It was plain that somebody knew of their plans and meant to capture them.

Alec heard the three making their way quietly back down the passage.

“Daddy! I expect they think the tide will soon be going down and they hope to make their escape by way of the beach,” whispered Alec. “I hope the soldiers will be there in time.”

“Don’t you worry about that!” said his father. “As soon as the tide washes off the beach, it will be full of soldiers.”

“I wish I could be there,” said Alec longingly. “I don’t expect the spies will come up here again.”

“Well, you can go and see what’s happening if you like,” said Daddy. “Your uncle and I will stay here—but you can see if the soldiers have arrived and if the girls are taking them down to the cove.”

Alec was delighted. More excitement for him, after all! He went up the passage and swarmed up the rope out of the entrance-hole. He sped over the moor to the cottage.

But no one was there. It was quite empty. “I suppose the soldiers have arrived and Mother and the girls have taken them to the cove,” thought Alec. “Yes—there are big wheel-marks in the road—a lorry has been here. Oh—there it is, in the shade of those trees over there. I’d better hurry or I’ll miss the fun!”

Off he dashed to the cliff-edge, and down the narrow, steep path. Where were the others? Waiting in silence down on the beach? Alec nearly fell down the steep path trying to hurry! What an exciting night!

CHAPTER 10

THE END OF IT ALL

Just as Alec was scrambling down the steep cliff, he heard the sound of a low voice from the top. "Is that you, Alec?"

Alec stopped. It was Ben's voice. "Ben!" he whispered in excitement. "Come on down. You're just in time. How did you get here?"

Ben scrambled down beside him. "I thought it was you," he said. "I saw you going over the edge of the cliff as I came up the lane. What's happened?"

Alec told him. Ben listened in excitement.

"So they know there's someone in the secret passage," he said. "They'll just have to try to escape by the beach then! Well, they'll be overpowered there, no doubt about that. I tied up the motor boat by the jetty, Alec. It's a real beauty—small but very powerful. It's got a lovely engine. Then I raced back to see if I could be in at the end."

"Well, you're just in time," said Alec. "I'm going to hop down on to the beach now and see where the others are."

"Be careful," Ben warned him. "The soldiers won't know it's you, and may take a pot-shot at you."

That scared Alec. He stopped before he jumped down on to the sand.

"Well, I think maybe we'd better stay here then," he said. "We can see anything that happens from here, can't we? Look, the tide is going down nicely now. Where do you suppose the others are, Ben?"

"I should think they are somewhere on the rocks that run round the cove," said Ben, looking carefully round. "Look, Alec—there's something shining just over there—see? I guess that's a gun. We can't see the man holding it—but the moonlight just picks out a shiny bit of his gun."

"I hope the girls and Mother are safe," said Alec.

"You may be sure they are," said Ben. "I wonder what the three spies are doing now. I guess they are waiting till the tide is low enough for them to come out."

At that very moment Rondel was looking out of the big cave to see if it was safe to try and escape over the beach. He was not going to try to go up the cliff-path, for he felt sure there would be someone at the top. Their only hope lay in slipping round the corner of the cove and making their way up the cliff some way off. Rondel knew the coast by heart, and if he only had the chance he felt certain he could take the others to safety.

The tide was going down rapidly. The sand was very wet and shone in the moonlight. Now and again a big wave swept up the beach, but the power behind it was gone. It could not dash anyone against the rocks now. Rondel turned to his two companions and spoke to them in a low voice.

"Now's our chance. We shall have to try the beach whilst our enemies think the tide is still high. Take hold of Gretel's hand, Otto, in case a wave comes. Follow me. Keep as close to the cliff as possible in case there is a watcher above."

The three of them came silently out of the big cave. Its entrance lay in darkness and they looked like deep black shadows as they moved quietly to the left of the cave. They made their way round the rocks, stopping as a big wave came splashing up the smooth sand. It swept round their feet, but no higher. Then it ran back down the sand again to the sea, and the three moved on once more.

Then a voice rang out in the moonlight: "We have you covered! There is no escape this way! Hands up!"

Rondel had his revolver in his hand in a moment and guns glinted in the hands of the others, too. But they did not know where their enemies were. The rocks lay in black shadows, and no one could be seen.

"There are men all round this cove," said the voice. "You cannot escape. Put your hands up and surrender. Throw your

revolvers down, please.”

Rondel spoke to the others in a savage voice. He was in a fierce rage, for all his plans were ruined. It seemed as if he were urging the others to fight. But they were wiser than Rondel. The other man threw his revolver down on the sand and put his hands above his head. The woman did the same. They glinted there like large silver shells.

“Hands up, you!” commanded a voice. Rondel shouted something angry in a foreign language and then threw his gun savagely at the nearest rocks. It hit them and the trigger was struck. The revolver went off with a loud explosion that echoed round and round the little cove and made everyone, Rondel as well, jump violently.

“Stand where you are,” said a voice. And out from the shadow of the rocks came a soldier in the uniform of an officer. He walked up to the three spies and had a look at them. He felt them all over to see if there were any more weapons hidden about them. There were none.

He called to his men. “Come and take them.”

Four men stepped out from the rocks around the cove. Alec and Ben leapt down on to the sand. Mother and the two girls came out from their hiding-place in a small cave. Ben ran up to the spies. He peered into the face of one of the men.

“I know who this is!” he cried. “It’s Professor Rondel, who lived in Sea Cottage. I’ve seen him hundreds of times! He didn’t have many friends—only two or three men who came to see him sometimes.”

“Oh,” said the officer, staring with interest at Ben. “Well, we’ll be very pleased to know who the two or three men were. You’ll be very useful to us, my boy. Now then—quick march! Up the cliff we go and into the lorry! The sooner we get these three into a safe place the better.”

Alec’s father and uncle appeared at that moment. They had heard the sound of the shot when Rondel’s revolver

struck the rock and went off, and they had come to see what was happening. Alec ran to them and told them.

“Good work!” said Daddy. “Three spies caught—and maybe the others they work with, too, if Ben can point them out. Good old Smuggler Ben!”

The three spies were put into the lorry and the driver climbed up behind the wheel. The officer saluted and took his place. Then the lorry rumbled off into the moonlit night. The four children watched it go, their eyes shining.

“This is the most thrilling night I’ve ever had in my life,” said Alec, with a sigh. “I don’t suppose I’ll ever have a more exciting one, however long I live. Golly, my heart did beat fast when we were hiding in the cave. It hurt me.”

“Same here,” said Hilary. “Oh, Daddy—you didn’t guess what you were in for, did you, when you came home yesterday?”

“I certainly didn’t,” said Daddy, putting his arm round the two girls and pushing them towards the house. “Come along—you’ll all be tired out. It must be nearly dawn!”

“Back to Professor Rondel’s own house!” said Alec. “Isn’t it funny! He got all his information from his books—and we found some of it there, too. We’ll show you if you like, Daddy.”

“Not to-night,” said Daddy firmly. “To-night—or rather this morning, for it’s morning now—you are going to bed, and to sleep. No more excitement, please! You will have plenty again to-morrow, for you’ll have to go over to the police and to the military camp to tell all you know.”

Well, that was an exciting piece of news, too. The children went indoors, Ben with them, for Mother said he had better sleep with Alec for the rest of the night.

Soon all four children were in their beds, feeling certain that they would never, never be able to go to sleep for one moment.

But it wasn’t more than two minutes before they were all sound asleep, as Mother saw when she peeped into the two

bedrooms. She went to join Daddy and Uncle Ned.

"Well, I'd simply no idea what the children were doing," she told them. "I was very angry with them one night when they came home late because they were caught by the tide when they were exploring those caves. They kept their secret well."

"They're good kids," said Daddy, with a yawn. "Well, let's go to sleep, too. Ned, I hope you'll be able to drop off on the sofa again."

"I could drop off on the kitchen stove, I'm so tired!" said Ned.

Soon the whole household slept soundly, and did not wake even when the sun came slanting in at the windows. They were all tired out.

They had a late breakfast, and the children chattered nineteen to the dozen as they ate porridge and bacon and eggs. It all seemed amazingly wonderful to them now that it was over. They couldn't help feeling rather proud of themselves.

"I must go," said Ben, when he had finished an enormous breakfast. "My uncle is expecting me to go out fishing with him this morning. He'll be angry because I'm late."

But before Ben could go, a messenger on a motor bike arrived, asking for the four children to go over to the police station at once. The police wanted to know the names of the men with whom Professor Rondel had made friends. This was very important, because unless they knew the names at once, the men might hear of Rondel's capture and fly out of the country.

So off went the four children, and spent a most exciting time telling and retelling their story from the very beginning. The inspector of the police listened carefully, and when everything had been told, and notes taken, he leaned back and looked at the children, his eyes twinkling.

"Well, we have reason to be very grateful to you four smugglers," he said. "We shall probably catch the whole

nest of spies operating in this part of the country. We suspected it—but we had no idea who the ringleader was. It was Rondel, of course. He was bringing men and women across from Ireland—spies, of course—and taking them about the country either to get information useful to the enemy, or to wreck valuable buildings. He was using the old smugglers' caves to hide his friends in. We shall comb the whole coast now."

"Can we help you?" asked Ben eagerly. "I know most of the caves, sir. And we can show you Rondel's books, where all the old caves are described. He's got dozens of them."

"Good!" said the inspector. "Well, that's all for to-day. You will hear from us later. There will be a little reward given to you for services to your country!"

The children filed out, talking excitedly. A little reward! What could it be?

"Sometimes children are given watches as a reward," said Alec, thinking of a newspaper report he had read. "We might get a watch each."

"I hope we don't," said Hilary, "because I've already got one—though it doesn't keep very good time."

But the reward wasn't watches. It was something much bigger than that. Can you possibly guess what it was?

It was the little motor boat belonging to the spies! When the children heard the news, they could hardly believe their ears. But it was quite true. There lay the little motor boat, tied up to the jetty, and on board was a police officer with instructions to hand it over to the four children.

"Oh—thank you!" said Alec, hardly able to speak. "Thank you very much. Oh, Ben—oh, Ben— isn't it marvellous!"

It *was* marvellous! It was a beautiful little boat with a magnificent engine. It was called *Otto*.

"That won't do," said Hilary, looking at the name. "We'll have that painted out at once. What shall we call our boat? It must be a very good name—something that will remind us of our adventure!"

“I know—I know!” yelled Alec. “We’ll call it *Smuggler Ben*, of course—and good old Ben shall be the captain, and we’ll be his crew.”

So *Smuggler Ben* the boat was called, and everyone agreed that it was a really good name. The children have a wonderful time in it. You should see them chug-chug-chugging over the sea at top speed, the spray flying high in the air! Aren’t they lucky!

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.
[The end of *Smuggler Ben* by Enid Blyton [pseudo: Mary Pollock]]